



Vital Statistics Program and Proposed Fee Increases

Introduction

The Texas Vital Statistics Program was established by the Legislature in 1903 to register births and deaths of the people of Texas. Today the Texas Vital Statistics Program serves as the repository for all vital records, including marriage and divorce records as well as repository for the vital records of four Texas State Registries. Currently there are over 48,000,000 records that legally document the vital events of Texans from 1903 to the present. The Program expects to receive close to a million more records in 2005.

Background:

Vital records are important to the individuals they represent as well as to all Texans. The medical and demographic data collected from these records are used extensively in public health research. The Department uses these records to research the factors that contribute to healthy birth outcomes, diseases affecting Texans, and to make decisions about public health campaigns and expenditure of funds.

For most Texans, Vital Statistics is about certified copies of birth and death certificates. People use these legal documents for purposes such as travel, resolution of family affairs, and genealogical research. The Department issues hundreds of thousands of certified copies of vital records each year. High volume requests and manual processing can result in delays, which can lead to customer dissatisfaction.

Purpose:

The Department is proposing to revise the Vital Statistics rule to 1) finance the preservation of vital statistics records by electronic imaging them through Texas Online, as mandated by the Texas Department of Information Resources, and 2) automate the availability and issuance of these documents to improve customer service.

The proposed rule changes will result in electronic imaging of all vital records, improved access to all records, increased preservation and security of records, and improved customer service. The proposed rule includes:

- A \$10 Texas Online fee that will be applied to requests for birth, death, marriage, and divorce records. (Texas Online proposes that the electronic imaging project be financed over five years.)
- An additional \$1 cost recovery fee for birth, death, marriage, and divorce record requests, as well as, certifications from three other Texas Registries. (To recover funds reduced by the appropriations.)
- A \$25 fee increase for the Heirloom Birth Certificate (Authorized by HB 2101 79th Legislature).
- A \$50 fee for parchment wedding commemoration (Mandated by HB 2100 79th Legislature).

Stakeholder Involvement and Impact Statement

The rule revision will affect over 490 local registrars and about 60 County Clerks who issue birth and death certificates in their registration districts or counties. By statute (Texas Health and Safety Code 191.0045), they must charge the same fee as the State office for these records. The proposed fee increase will raise revenue for local registrars and county clerks as they will not be required to remit any of the increase to the State. In June 2005, the Department notified the local registrars and county clerks regarding the request to revise the rules and change fees. In addition, the proposed rule changes were posted to the Texas Vital Statistics website and e-mailed. *Program Contact: Geraldine Harris, State Registrar/Unit Manager, Vital Statistics Unit, Phone: 512-458-7366, geraldine.harris@dshs.state.tx.us*